

December 7, 1955

Dr. Ernest W. Goodpasture
Armed Forces Institute of Pathology
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Dr. Goodpasture:

Thank you for your interesting letter of the 5th. I am personally very much gratified at the opinions you expressed relative to the integration of the medical schools with their universities. Similar comments by Dr. Lippard at Yale and our own Dean Bowers encourage the belief that there is a swelling tide in this direction. As you may know, I started my own research career as a medical student but left the medical school for a Ph. D. program when I discovered that the M.D. program at my alma mater left too little time and interest for research training. I hope that this disillusionment will be averted for future generations of students.

It is then perhaps no coincidence that the possible role of genetics in the medical school should be of interest to several institutions. Perhaps you would be interested in an outline I have prepared as a basis for discussion with them. I feel that a genetics unit in residence at the medical school itself would be bound to have a greater impact than if it is located at another affiliated college, but the first requirement is that the subject be soundly represented at the university altogether. I also feel that human genetics per se is too narrow a channel for the manifold points of impact of genetics with medicine, some of which are listed in the enclosure. The main qualification for leadership would be a sound appreciation of all the fields of genetics, coupled with the capacity to communicate with his clinical colleagues and students, and particular research abilities in any one of many scientific fields related to medicine. Unhappily, very few medically trained workers in this country exist to fill the bill, and are not likely to appear until this kind of program is installed in our medical schools.

Without knowing your response to these views and their bearing on the equally important development of Biology independently of Medicine, I would not venture to propose other candidates; in any event the number of possible appointees with outstanding qualifications is severely limited. These proposals and the evaluation of Dr. Neel, as requested, are attached.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

James V. Neel, Ph.D., M.D.

Dr. Neel has probably done more work to popularize human genetics as a scientific discipline, both among geneticists and clinicians, than any other one person in this country. He is a person with tremendous drive and enthusiasm and demonstrated administrative talent. There is no person with competent genetic training who could more effectively tackle the dual task of managing the affairs of a biology department and setting up a vigorous program of human genetics. In this context, there is laterally no one more promising for the indicated position. By the same token, he is quite unlikely to accept the position unless it promised him the opportunity to develop a program in human genetics commensurate with his own ambition. The main criticism that I would offer is probably irrelevant to the needs of the position and is that Neel is more of an administrator than a scientist; the very intensity of his interest in human genetics might be a drawback in the affairs of a department with wider aims. This comment may be a reflection of my own bias, but I would fear that such fields, say, as microbial genetics would not receive much emphasis under his administration. However, Dr. Neel knows himself quite well and would not undertake the position himself if he did not feel he were qualified for it, and I would give the strongest weight to his own judgment. Taking all circumstances into account, I believe that Vanderbilt would be very fortunate to succeed in winning Neel away from Michigan and, in the area of human genetics, there is no one who would remotely approach him in suitability for the position.

One of the obstacles is the necessity of combining the qualifications in genetics and for chairmanship of Biology in one person. There are some outstanding younger people that could be recommended to you in medical genetics.

outstanding

Some other/possibilities (who are not human geneticists)

Lloyd W. Law at Bethesda

Bentley Glass at Johns Hopkins

A. C. Allison (definitely a human geneticist; the discoverer of the correlation between malaria and sickle cell anemia) — at Oxford, England